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ABSTRACT

The "Write a Sentence Test" was developed for use in the evaluation of student writing abilities in association with a project in Memphis, Tennessee. This paper discusses ways of administering and scoring the test, decisions concerning modification of the test, and experiences when the test was administered to sample subjects. All forms of the test, directions for scoring the test, and accompanying data sheets are presented. The test provides scores for capitalization, punctuation, grammar, and syntax. Problems encountered in scoring for capitalization and punctuation concern variation in sentence complexity level across student responses. Disagreements among English teachers concerning punctuation were found to result in scoring difficulties. With regard to the grammar and syntax scores, sample teachers complained that derivation of the scores was too time consuming. Improper responses by students constituted yet another problem. Changes in the test following its administration included dictation of sentences for deriving capitalization and punctuation scores, use of holistic grading of essays for derivation of grammar-syntax scores, and elimination of papers of students responding improperly. (TJH)

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THE WRITE A SENTENCE TEST

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THE WRITE A SENTENCE TEST

The Write a Sentence Test was developed for use in the evaluation of a project in Memphis. We needed measures of student writing ability. Student paragraphs scored by holistic procedures were selected to measure organization, clarity, and descriptive language. The Write a Sentence Test was developed as a supplement. It provides scores on capitalization, punctuation, and grammar-syntax. The desirable feature of this test is that the scores are derived from students' actual writing.

Attached to this paper is a copy of all forms of the test, the directions for scoring, and a couple of the data sheets we used. Today, I will demonstrate how to score the test, will tell you briefly of the problems we encountered in scoring the test, and will tell you of decisions made to change the test.

Administration of the Test

The Examiners distribute the forms to students and inform them that they are to write a sentence about each of the pictures. They are also told to skip the dotted line. The reason for this direction is that examiners will write the correct form for what the student wrote on the dotted line. Right from the first, know that you will be dealing with a student form and a corrected form of the same sentence. The correspondence between the two provides the basis for deriving the three scores of this test.

The three scores are derived as follows:

Capitalization Score

The number of words in the student form is the maximum raw score that can be obtained. Each word provides a decision point. A point is subtracted from the maximum raw score for each capital letter left out and for each capital letter put in that shouldn't be there. A score is obtained for each of three sentences. These scores for the three sentences are summed and divided by the sum of the maximum raw scores that could be obtained for the three sentences. The resulting percentage is the capitalization score.

Punctuation Score

The score on punctuation is derived in a similar manner. The number of words in the student form is the maximum

raw score that can be obtained. The space after each word provides a decision point. A point is subtracted for every incorrect punctuation mark, every punctuation mark left out, and every punctuation mark put in that doesn't belong. This analysis is performed for each of three sentences. The raw scores are summed and divided by the sum of the maximum raw score that can be obtained for the three sentences.

Grammar-Syntax Score

Some years ago, while surveying available tests for the evaluation of a bilingual education program, I came across an instrument called the Bilingual Syntax Measure published by Harcourt Brace. The test was used to show progress or to plan instruction for a student learning to speak English. Examiners using the test taped students' responses to questions and then scored them according to their correspondence to correct English. In other words, the student response was rewritten into correct form. Points were assigned the correct form according to a set of rules and then the student's score was derived by subtracting points according to another set of rules.

The grammar-syntax score obtained for the Write a Sentence Test makes use of these rules for scoring. The main difference is that the examiner is dealing with written responses rather than spoken. The maximum raw score for a sentence is obtained by summing the points assigned to words in the corrected form. A summary of these follows.

Plain words in the sentence are given one point. Word endings are given a point. Thus, the word "called" is given one point for call and one point for the ending. Words that are irregular when forming past test or plurals are given two points. All pronouns except "it" are given two points. Possessive pronouns are given three points.

When deriving the student's score, points are subtracted from the maximum raw score assigned the corrected form for the following reasons: missing word, missing word part, words in the wrong order, extra words, misformed words, misformed parts of words.

The maximum raw score of the corrected form and the student score are calculated for each of the three sentences. The total for the student forms is divided by the total for the corrected forms to obtain the grammar-syntax score.

Problems Faced While Scoring The Write A Sentence Test

With respect to the capitalization score, one problem noted is that students writing sentences containing proper names or nouns were more likely to lose points than the students who wrote sentences requiring a single capital letter to start the sentence. Test difficulty depended on what the student wanted to write.

The same thing can be said for the punctuation score. Students who wrote simple sentences requiring only a period at the end made better scores than those writing sentences requiring a series of commas, quotation marks, etc. One of the outcomes expected from the project was that student participants would write more easily. This test may penalize those that do. The longer and more complicated sentences provide more opportunities for the students to lose points.

Another problem surfaced in the scoring of the test for punctuation. English teachers making the analyses of the sentences occasionally disagreed regarding where and if punctuation marks were needed.

With respect to the grammar-syntax score, the English teachers stated that it took too long to derive the scores. Not being familiar with the rules for assigning points to the corrected form and points to the student form resulted in part of the delay.

Improper responses from the students were also encountered. These were a problem. A few students responded with writings that were not single sentences but two or three sentences separated by commas.

Decisions to Change The Write a Sentence Test

It was decided that the test could be improved by having sentences dictated for deriving both the capitalization and punctuation scores. In that way the difficulty level could be controlled and knowledge of a variety of rules could be tested.

With respect to the grammar-syntax test, We have decided that the grammar-syntax procedures could be used on the paragraphs written by students in the project and scored as essays by holistic grading procedures. The paragraphs would take additional time for scoring. However, one thing we can do in research and evaluation studies is work with samples. We don't have to grade every student's test.

In addition to using paragraphs instead of sentences, we will write directions for eliminating the papers of students not responding properly from the scoring. A report by type of improper response will be included in any data analysis for selected samples. This will avoid the pain of trying to derive some kind of score for those papers.

Scoring the Write a Sentence Test takes time. It would be helpful to have a computer program perform the calculations.

DIRECTIONS FOR SCORING

THE WRITE A SENTENCE TEST

DIRECTIONS FOR ADMINISTERING THE WRITE A SENTENCE TEST

Distribute the forms to the students. Caution students to listen to directions before beginning to work.

> SAY: Today we are going to write sentences.

Ask individual students to dictate a sentence about an object in the room. Write the sentence on the chalkboard.

Hold up a form and point to the three pictures.

> SAY: You will write one sentence beside each of the pictures on this form.

Point to the lines beside each picture.

> SAY: Write your sentences for each picture on the dark lines. Skip the dotted lines. Use your best writing.
>
> You may not ask how to spell words. Spell the words as best you can.
>
> Are there any questions? You can begin.

Circulate among students to see that they are following directions with respect to skipping the dotted lines.

The test is not timed. You should be able to take the forms up in 10 or 15 minutes.

WRITE A SENTENCE ABOUT EACH PICTURE SKIP THE DOTTED LINES

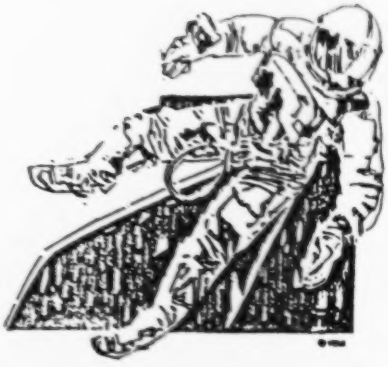
Your Name_____ School_____

Your Teacher's Name_____ Grade_____

WRITE A SENTENCE ABOUT EACH PICTURE SKIP THE DOTTED LINES

1.

2.



3.

ELEMENTARY FORM

WRITE A SENTENCE ABOUT EACH PICTURE SKIP THE DOTTED LINES

Your Name_____ School_____

Your Teacher's Name_____ Grade_____

WRITE A SENTENCE ABOUT EACH PICTURE SKIP THE DOTTED LINES

1.

2.

3.

ELEMENTARY FORM

WRITE A SENTENCE ABOUT EACH PICTURE SKIP THE DOTTED LINES

Your Name_____ School_____

Subject _____ Teacher_____

1.

2.

3.

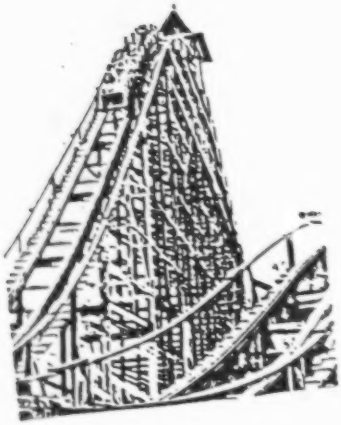
WRITE A SENTENCE ABOUT EACH PICTURE SKIP THE DOTTED LINES

Your Name_____ School_____

Subject _____ Teacher_____

1.

2.



3.

DIRECTIONS FOR SCORING THE WRITE A SENTENCE TEST

Step One

On the dotted line, write out the corrected form of the sentence which the student wrote.

Step Two Capitalization Score

Assign points to the corrected form corresponding to the number of words in the sentence. Enter the total for each of the three sentences in column 1 of the score summary sheet.

Assign points to the student form according to the number of words correctly capitalized plus the number of words correctly not capitalized. Enter the totals for the three sentences under column 2.

Divide the total for the student forms in column 2 by the total for the corrected forms in column 1. This is the student's capitalization score.

Step Three Punctuation Score

Assign points to the corrected form according to the number of words in the sentence. Enter the total for each of the three sentences in column 3 of the score summary sheet.

Assign points to the student form according to the number of words after which the student placed a punctuation mark corresponding to that of the corrected form. Add points for the number of words after which the student did not place a punctuation mark corresponding to the corrected form. Enter the total for each of the three sentences in column 4 of the score summary sheet.

Divide the total for the student forms in column 4 by the total for the corrected forms in column 1. This is the student's capitalization score.

Step Four Grammar-Syntax Score

Assign points to the corrected form according to the attached rules. Enter this number for each sentence in column 5.

Assign points to the student form according to the match made to the corrected form. Points are to be determined according to the scoring rules attached. Enter the points for each of the three sentences in column 6.

Divide the total in column 6 by the total in column 5. This is the grammar-syntax score.

DIRECTIONS FOR SCORING THE WRITE A SENTENCE TEST

Step One	On the dotted line, write out the corrected form of the sentence which the student wrote.
Step Two Capitalization Score	Assign points to the corrected form corresponding to the number of words in the sentence. Enter the total for each of the three sentences in column 1 of the score summary sheet.
	Assign points to the student form according to the number of words correctly capitalized plus the number of words correctly not capitalized. Enter the totals for the three sentences under column 2.
	Divide the total for the student forms in column 2 by the total for the corrected forms in column 1. This is the student's capitalization score.
Step Three Punctuation Score	Assign points to the corrected form according to the number of words in the sentence. Enter the total for each of the three sentences in column 3 of the score summary sheet.
	Assign points to the student form according to the number of words after which the student placed a punctuation mark corresponding to that of the corrected form. Add points for the number of words after which the student did not place a punctuation mark corresponding to the corrected form. Enter the total for each of the three sentences in column 4 of the score summary sheet.
	Divide the total for the student forms in column 4 by the total for the corrected forms in column 1. This is the student's capitalization score.
Step Four Grammar-Syntax Score	Assign points to the corrected form according to the attached rules. Enter this number for each sentence in column 5.
	Assign points to the student form according to the match made to the corrected form. Points are to be determined according to the scoring rules attached. Enter the points for each of the three sentences in column 6.
	Divide the total in column 6 by the total in column 5. This is the grammar-syntax score.

CAPITALIZATION SCORE

Assigning Points to the Student Form

1. Missing capital letters

Student form	The meeting was held in mobile. (-1)	Points 5
Corrected form	The meeting was held in Mobile.	Points 6

2. Words capitalized that should not be capitalized

Student form	They walked down the Street together. (-1)	Points 5
Corrected form	They walked down the street together.	Points 6

PUNCTUATION SCORE

Assigning Points to the Student Form

1. Missing punctuation marks

Student form	Mary what is your answer? (-1)	Points 4
Corrected form	Mary, what is your answer?	Points 5

2. Incorrect punctuation marks

Student form	Has the mailman come. (-1)	Points 3
Corrected form	Has the mailman come?	Points 4

3. Addition of punctuation marks not needed

Student form	Please read the sentence, on the board. (-1)	Points 7
Corrected form	Please read the sentence on the board.	Points 8

General Rules for Assigning Points * GRAMMAR-SYNTAX SCORE

1 POINT MORPHEMES

A. All plain words are worth one point. A plain word is one that has no grammatical ending attached to it, and is in its regular form. Examples are given below.

verbs: give, want, like, eat, have
nouns: worm, man, guy, fatso, king, thing
articles: a, an, the
prepositions: in, on, to, into
conjunctions: and, because, 'cause, then, but
negatives: not/n't, no, nothing, none
adverbs: there, hardly, only, never, ever, so, as, still, maybe
demonstratives: this, that
modals: will/'ll, can, must
plain auxiliaries: have/'ve, be
quantifiers: some, much, more, lot, lots

B. Grammatical endings on verbs, nouns, and adjectives are also worth one point. Ending types are given below.

VERBS
progressive-*ing*: giving, mopping, having
perfect-*en*: eaten, been
regular past-*ed*: dropped
regular third person-s: eats, wants, lives
irregular third person: has, does

NOUNS
plural-s: windows, sandwiches, houses, flowers
possessive 's: king's, man's

ADJECTIVES
comparatives: bigger, fatter
superlatives: biggest, fattest

2 POINT MORPHEMES

All words (nouns, verbs, and auxiliaries) that are not in their regular (plain) form, because they convey an extra bit of meaning, are worth two points. These are often called "irregular" forms. For example, *took, ate,* was, are changed in form because they convey the past tense, or *those* and *these* are changed in form to convey the plural. In addition, pronouns are worth two points. They express case, number, and gender.

Other examples are given below.
irregular auxiliaries: are/'re, has/'s, was, is/'s
modals tensed: would/'d, might, should, could
irregular plurals: children
irregular quantifiers: any, anything
all pronouns except *it*: I, me, you, she, her, he, him, they, them
plural demonstratives: those, these
irregular verb forms: took, bit, fell, ate, had/'d

3 POINT MORPHEMES

All the possessive pronouns are worth three points. Examples are *hers, his, theirs.*

* Procedures for assigning points used in scoring were obtained from the Bilingual Syntax Measure Manual published by Harcourt Brace,

GRAMMAR-SYNTAX SCORE

ASSIGNING POINTS TO THE STUDENT FORM

1. Missing Words

Student form Mother will the dress. (-1) Points = 4

Corrected form Mother will iron the dress.
1 1 1 1 1 Points = 5

2. Missing parts of words

Student form She want to iron the dress. (-1) Points = 7

Corrected form She wants to iron the dress.
2 1 1 1 1 1 Points = 8

3. Words in the wrong order

Student form Wants she to iron the dress. (-1) Points = 7

Corrected form She wants to iron the dress.
2 1 1 1 1 1 1 Points = 8

4. Extra words

Student form She wants for to iron the dress. (-1) Points = 7

Corrected form She wants to iron the dress.
2 1 1 1 1 1 1 Points = 8

5. Misformed words

Student form Her will iron the dress. (-1) Points = 5

Corrected form She will iron the dress.
2 1 1 1 1 Points = 6

Student form She will ate the dinner. (-1) Points = 6

Coorrected form She will eat the dinner.
2 1 2 1 1 Points = 7

6. Misformed parts of words

Student form The childs will be coming to eat supper. (-1) Points = 10

Corrected form The children are coming to eat supper.
1 2 2 1 1 1 2 1 Points = 11

Student form She's cooks it for them. (-1/2) Points = 9.5

Corrected form She's cooking it for them.
2 2 1 1 1 1 2 Points = 10

General Rules for Assigning Points * GRAMMAR-SYNTAX SCORE

1 POINT MORPHEMES

A. All plain words are worth one point. A plain word is one that has no grammatical ending attached to it, and is in its regular form. Examples are given below.

verbs: give, want, like, eat, have
nouns: worm, man, guy, fatso, king, thing
articles: a, an, the
prepositions: in, on, to, into
conjunctions: and, because, 'cause, then, but
negatives: not/n't, no, nothing, none
adverbs: there, hardly, only, never, ever, so, as, still, maybe
demonstratives: this, that
modals: will/'ll, can, must
plain auxiliaries: have/'ve, be
quantifiers: some, much, more, lot, lots

B. Grammatical endings on verbs, nouns, and adjectives are also worth one point. Ending types are given below.

VERBS
progressive-*ing*: giving, mopping, having
perfect-*en*: eaten, been
regular past-*ed*: dropped
regular third person-*s*: eats, wants, lives
irregular third person: has, does

NOUNS
plural-*s*: windows, sandwiches, houses, flowers
possessive 's: king's, man's

ADJECTIVES
comparatives: bigger, fatter
superlatives: biggest, fattest

2 POINT MORPHEMES

All words (nouns, verbs, and auxiliaries) that are not in their regular (plain) form, because they convey an extra bit of meaning, are worth two points. These are often called "irregular" forms. For example, *took, ate,* was, are changed in form because they convey the past tense, or *those* and *these* are changed in form to convey the plural. In addition, pronouns are worth two points. They express case, number, and gender.

Other examples are given below.

irregular auxiliaries: are/'re, has/'s, was, is/'s
modals tensed: would/'d, might, should, could
irregular plurals: children
irregular quantifiers: any, anything
all pronouns except *it*: I, me, you, she, her, he, him, they, them
plural demonstratives: those, these
irregular verb forms: took, bit, fell, ate, had/'d

3 POINT MORPHEMES

All the possessive pronouns are worth three points. Examples are *hers, his, theirs.*

* Procedures for assigning points used in scoring were obtained from the Bilingual Syntax Measure Manual published by Harcourt Brace

NAME _____

	Capitalization		Punctuation		Grammar & Syntax	
	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form
Sentence #1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
TOTALS	_____ Col. 1	_____ Col. 2	_____ Col. 3	_____ Col. 4	_____ Col. 5	_____ Col. 6
Score	_____%		_____%		_____%	

NAME _____

	Capitalization		Punctuation		Grammar & Syntax	
	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form
Sentence #1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
TOTALS	_____ Col. 1	_____ Col. 2	_____ Col. 3	_____ Col. 4	_____ Col. 5	_____ Col. 6
Score	_____%		_____%		_____%	

NAME _____

	Capitalization		Punctuation		Grammar & Syntax	
	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form
Sentence #1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
TOTALS	_____ Col. 1	_____ Col. 2	_____ Col. 3	_____ Col. 4	_____ Col. 5	_____ Col. 6
Score	_____%		_____%		_____%	

NAME _____

	Capitalization		Punctuation		Grammar & Syntax	
	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form	Corrected Form	Student Form
Sentence #1	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #2	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
Sentence #3	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
TOTALS	_____ Col. 1	_____ Col. 2	_____ Col. 3	_____ Col. 4	_____ Col. 5	_____ Col. 6
Score	_____%		_____%		_____%	

Class _____

Grade _____

		Pre	Post
1.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
2.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
3.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
4.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
5.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
6.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
7.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
8.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
9.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
10.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
11.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
12.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
13.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
14.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___
15.	Capitalization	___	___
	Punctuation	___	___
	Grammar & Syntax	___	___

CLASS SUMMARY SHEET FOR RANDOM SAMPLE OF 15 STUDENTS
USED IN THE EVALUATION OF MEMPHIS' WRITING PROJECT